





Armies That Sustain Themselves Will Win

*An Interview With
Sgt. Maj. of the Army
Daniel Dailey*

■ By Sgt. Maj. Edward A. Bell

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey attends a cake cutting ceremony for the Army's 242nd birthday on June 14, 2017. (Photo by Daniel Torok)

The Army's senior enlisted Soldier discusses vital topics concerning Army logisticians.

Since the start of his career in 1989, the 15th Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey has been earning a reputation for taking care of Soldiers. His career includes every enlisted leadership position in the mechanized infantry. I recently sat down with him to get his impressions of the Army's sustainment professionals and to find out what advice he has for future logisticians.

You've worked alongside logisticians throughout your career. What are your insights on the importance of the sustainment community?

I never had true appreciation for sustainment until I became a senior logistician inside my brigade combat team's headquarters and headquarters company. I quickly realized that fuel, water, and chow will bring an organization to its knees within hours if they are not replenished.

The level of importance, and the art that is involved in sustaining, became clear after my seventh consecutive night without sleep and going 300 miles in the wrong direction to get water just so my warfighters were fed and hydrated. My young men could fight for days, but they couldn't do so without sustainment.

Every great leader throughout modern history has said armies that sustain themselves are armies that will win wars. Napoleon was famous for it. All the great leaders that appreciated that concept became victorious, because ultimately that's what it comes down to.

In World War II, our first objective was to go after the long-term sustainment capabilities of our enemies: factories, production systems, all those things. If you can destroy the supply chain of your potential adversary, it's just a matter of time before they are defeated.

From your visits to Soldiers around the world, what is your assessment of sustainment professionals?

I am in awe every single day of the professionals in our sustainment enterprise. I recently visited the Natick Soldier Systems Center, and a gentleman sitting next to me told me he knew the status of every piece of Army equipment for which he was the program manager. So I said, "Oh really? How?"

He showed me how, and I was amazed. It was a level of surgical expertise that is unheard of in any organization. It would be like someone running 24-hour surveillance of every vehicle on the road and calling you when they know your fan belt is going to break. Just imagine!

That's why we have the greatest sustainment force in the world and hence the greatest combat formation in the world. You have this depth of infrastructure that most Soldiers are unaware of that keeps them going every single day. Every time I see it I am amazed at the scale and complexity of how it works and at its flexibility.

You hear the old analogy, "It takes a long time to turn around a battleship." Our sustainment community is probably the biggest battleship out there. We sustain not just the Army, but we're also the sustainment backbone for all of the Department of Defense. It's amazing how nimble that sustainment battleship is.

As you engage Soldiers, what's on their minds in terms of future sustainment needs?

Soldiers want the newest thing, the latest and greatest. Today they are very used to getting that, so they're always waiting for it. I call it the intangible confidence within the system—knowing that when you ask for something, you're going to get a better product.

What we have to do is manage expectations. Soldiers have to know that they're heard and that their requirements translate from the end user to the program manager. That voice then translates to development or investment into some type

of technology to meet that requirement in the field. And we have really improved on this over the course of the 30 years that I've been in the Army.

I often ask Soldiers why they fight. There's a whole bunch of reasons, but one big one: because the Army takes care of people. Soldiers know they're going to get evacuated if they get injured. They know this nation is going to provide them with the best equipment available and that the American people are going to work feverishly to put capabilities in Soldiers' hands that exceed those of potential enemies.

Armies I've worked with throughout the world don't have the same ability to say those things. I've been asked, in amazement, by our allies about the commitment of the

American Soldier. And I tell them it's not one thing; it's a whole bunch of things collectively that make these young men and women do what they do every single day.

That's why we have to work so hard to give them the tools necessary to be able to fight and win and to have confidence in themselves. I want very confident, competent, capable Soldiers. Give me a couple of those, and we can do pretty much anything.

Do you have any advice for developing future leaders in logistics?

Never underestimate the value of training and educating our Soldiers. Allow them to take a pause from what they're doing on a day-to-day basis for opportunities to grow. We

are a busy Army, and the mission is always first. But we are an organization made up of people, and we will only be as good as the amount of time and energy we put into our people.

We stress the sustainment community every single day. In Iraq or Afghanistan, it's hard to let that one Soldier go take that broadening assignment or professional development opportunity. It's especially hard for those who are rowing hard, your lead rowers in the front of the boat who are rowing every day. We can't be blinded by that.

So I think this is one area we can do better. The mission is critical; we've got to make missions happen. But no one is more important than the institution itself. By not letting that individual go, believe it or not,



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey calls the mother of Pfc. Brandon Shartzter, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 82nd Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, to wish her a happy birthday from Bolesławiec, Poland, on Dec. 16, 2017. (Photo by Spc. Hubert D. Delany)

you're actually sacrificing the rest of the institution.

The noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps is the backbone of the Army. What role will it continue to play in building readiness for the expeditionary environment of the future?

Readiness is the one thing you hear the chief of staff of the Army mention every single time he speaks. Our job is to deter our adversaries. If we can't deter them, we will defeat them—but we're not going to let that happen in the homeland. That's why you'll hear me say we don't play home games.

The last time the United States played a home game was in World War II. It was the invasion of the Aleutian Islands by the Japanese, and we gave up some of the home

territory. We cannot, and will not, allow that to happen on this soil again. We no longer have the greatest competitive edge in the world, so we have to be ready enough to deter anyone from ever thinking about it.

Our NCOs have been essential as we have transitioned from the environments of the past 16 years to the even more complex environment of today. Their power and authorities have increased throughout time because of the decentralized nature of the current battlefield.

Back in colonial times, the battlefield was linear. It was very close, and Soldiers had visual contact with their officers. But as you progress [in time] and get through places like World War II, there is a huge battlefield. It's very complex and fast-paced, and now our NCOs

have to be competent and able to receive and translate orders from officers and then go out and conduct decentralized operations.

This is the case even more so today. You see those NCOs out by themselves at the tip of the spear in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. The level of responsibility and risk we place on our NCOs will only continue to increase in the future.

As the senior enlisted Soldier, what keeps you up at night?

I pride myself on the fact that I sleep pretty soundly. I go to bed without guilt because I do physical training every morning! But I do worry about things. I worry about not having the best NCO corps in the world. We say we are the best all the time, and I firmly believe that we are. But I think we have to take our blinders off and humble ourselves sometimes. There's a reason we got here, and there's a path to how we stay here. We have to be careful that we're not taking that for granted.

Nondeployable Soldiers worry me. I want to take care of Soldiers, and I think that once we hurt them, we own them for the rest of their lives. It's tough to look a Soldier in the eye and say, "You can't stay." But we have to do it if it's the right thing for the institution.

Soldiers have to realize that the institution is bigger than they are individually. When it's time for me to leave, when I can't do the mission anymore, and when I can't meet basic requirements to be a Soldier, I need to be able to look myself in the mirror and say, "Okay, it's time to let someone else do this job."

It's the balance of three things: knowledge, skills, and ability. I can have all the knowledge in the world, but if I don't have the ability or the skills to put it into application, it doesn't mean anything to the institution. I'm just another burden to it.

I also worry about getting the



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey speaks to students attending the Sergeants Major Academy during the 2016 International Training and Leader Development Symposium at Fort Bliss, Texas, on April 13, 2016. (Photo by Sgt. James Avery)

support we need to be able to do the missions we're doing around the world. It's a fight we have every single day, but it's a balance. It's about what we truly need, not asking for too much, preserving the resources we have, and utilizing them to the maximum extent to train our Soldiers and fight and win.

I'm not one who is willing to ask for more unless we absolutely need it. Sometimes we are very good at asking for stuff and are not as good at using it. We have to be careful of that.

We own the hearts and minds of the American people, and they will do anything they can to make sure we have the tools necessary. They trust that the tools we are asking for are the ones we really need, and we have to be confident that we're doing that.

Sustaining the fight does not occur solely on the battlefield. How critical is family readiness for the Army's success?

It's very critical. I'm a Soldier, and I have a family. When Soldiers are in combat, I want them focused on keeping themselves and their buddies alive. I don't want them focused on the needs of their family. I don't mean that in a selfish way. It's not that they shouldn't be focused on their families' needs; they just shouldn't have to be.

We need to provide our families with adequate care and services to sustain the requirements for their Soldiers to do this job every day. No matter how you write it, when you multiply the cost of doing that by the number of families we have, it's going to be a big number. But I can tell you right now, it's well worth it.

Families are readiness. American Soldiers will give their lives—and families in America will accept the fact that they did—if they know their families are taken care of. If you remove any one of those elements, the same level of trust and confidence will not come from the Soldier or the American people.

Relationships with the community and the nation as a whole are vital. How can we strengthen these relationships?

I think we are doing a much better job at this. When we entered into the past 16 years of war, we stayed on installations and closed our gates because of security requirements. We were very cautious about who we talked to and fell into this behavior almost indirectly.

Every Soldier is an ambassador, and I remind them of that all the time. Inside or outside our gates, they should be upholding the standards of what is expected of them by the people of the United States.

But we have to let the American people know these are our hometowns. My son didn't grow up in Palmerton, Pennsylvania, where I was raised. He grew up in Fort Carson, Colorado, and Fort Stewart, Georgia. Those were our communities. So we've got to sustain those relationships so there's a true understanding and appreciation of our Soldiers in those communities. Many of those communities survive simply because our Soldiers are there.

Every time I travel, I notice there's an investment I make with Soldiers during the day; my night job is investment in the community. So I find councils or civilian leaders and remind them of the importance of collaboration.

This needs to be done at all levels. Every Soldier is an ambassador, and I remind them of that all the time. Inside or outside our gates, they should be upholding the standards of what is expected of them by the people of the United States.

And you don't even have to define that for a Soldier; as soon as you say that sentence, it's clearly understood what their behavior should be. It's everybody's job to maintain those re-

lationships, and it has a humongous impact.

What's the number one thing the Army can provide Soldiers to prepare them for future conflicts?

Leadership. It's the only variable in the Army. We do a really good job of making sure like organizations have the same amount of people and equipment all the way down to copy machines, computers,

and rifles. Everything's the same. We send Soldiers to organizations at random. There are some units in the Army that think they have all the best Soldiers in the world, that we hand-selected every one of them. That is completely untrue. They're completely random from the entire population of the United States. The only dynamic that's different from one organization to another is the leader.

So when you have an environment that has the same number of knobs; the same number of rifles, trucks, and Humvees; the same number of copy machines and bathrooms; and the same number of buildings, barracks, and all those other things invest in the one dynamic that makes a difference. And that's leadership.

Sgt. Maj. Edward A. Bell is the sergeant major for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4. He has an associate's degree in management from Summit University, a bachelor's degree in business administration from Touro University, and an executive leadership certificate from the University of Kansas School of Business.